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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC, MOSCOW FOR BENEDICT WOLF

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SUBJECT: MFA ON LAVROV VISIT, NARYSHKIN DIPLOMACY

REF: BAKU 109

Classified By: Political/Economic Counselor Robert Garverick, Reasons 1
.4.(b),(d)

11. (C) Summary. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrives in Baku March 11 for a two-day working visit that will include meetings with President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Mammadyarov as well as the ceremonial opening of a Russian cultural center. In advance of Lavrov's arrival, Pol/Econ Counselor met on March 10 with the head of the First Territorial Department of the Azerbaijan MFA, Rahman Mustafayev (Note: This department has responsibility for the U.S., Europe and the FSU from the Urals region and Caspian Sea westward. End Note.) Mustafayev gave a generally positive and practical view of the upcoming visit, but indicated some skepticism about the more over-the-top Russian pledges of cooperation and brotherhood. He also provided context on the role of Kremlin apparat chief Naryshkin in bilateral relations. End Summary.

12. (C) Biographical Note: Mustafayev, who occupies a position one level below deputy minister, is one of relatively few officials at MFA whose career began in the Soviet diplomatic service. His father was also a Soviet diplomat whose foreign postings included North Africa.

13. (C) Mustafayev said that Russian-Azerbaijani relations are basically good, with "no serious problems," a generalization that seems more to reflect a pragmatic approach to the issues on which Azerbaijan has to cooperate with Russia than genuine satisfaction, given the continuing reverberations of Azerbaijan's recent accusations of massive Russian arms transfers to Armenia. Among the priority topics for this visit, he said, was Caspian delimitation, where the positions of Azerbaijan and Russia are compatible and contrast with Iran's excessive claims. Additionally, economic issues are important, considering that Russia is the main market for Azerbaijan's exports in non-oil and gas sectors.

Naryshkin and Other High-Powered Visitors

14. (C) Pol/Econ Counselor observed to Mustafayev that the head of the Russian Presidential Administration, Sergey Naryshkin, is a frequent visitor to Baku. (Note: Naryshkin was present at Aliyev's October 29 inauguration, returned to Baku December 28, and again February 28-March 2. End Note.) Mustafayev observed first that Naryshkin's frequent visits

are connected to his co-chairmanship of the joint Russia-Azerbaijan economic partnership commission. He also said that Azerbaijan values Naryshkin's visits because they consider him to be a direct and convenient conduit to Prime Minister Putin.

¶5. (U) Naryshkin also tends to bring along high-powered delegations, underscoring the importance that Russia places on keeping Azerbaijan close. Accompanying him on his last visit were Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin and Energy Minister Sergey Shmatko. Ostensibly, the delegation came to Azerbaijan to open a Baku branch of Moscow State University, as well as to conduct talks on economic issues. Shmatko, Mustafayev pointed out, is a new member of Naryshkin's delegation. He met with his counterpart, Minister of Energy Natiq Aliyev, while in Baku.

¶6. (C) While the list of visitors is impressive, the GOAJ is not completely bowled over by the high-level attention. Mustafayev could not resist rolling his eyes as he recalled Naryshkin's recent statement - one that has been echoed by several senior Russian officials - that Azerbaijan is Russia's "main political and economic partner in the Caucasus." He made clear that in Azerbaijan's view, Armenia is Russia's primary partner in the neighborhood.

Comment

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¶7. (C) Lavrov's visit comes at an opportune moment. With the constitutional referendum approaching and international criticism of Azerbaijan's democratic shortcomings mounting, this may seem to Moscow to be a good time to remind Azerbaijan that it does have allies who do not care to interfere in internal matters.⁸ Also, as Mustafayev mentioned, there are a number of practical issues, such as preparations for the third Caspian summit and migration issues, to be considered. On the other hand, issues such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian support for Armenia and the nascent CSTO rapid reaction force - which has met with considerable suspicion in Baku - are still huge obstacles to trust and cooperation. These are the kinds of issues that may have to be addressed at a future meeting of presidents; and it may be that the organization of such a meeting is another purpose of Lavrov's visit.

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